

School Violence Crisis Intervention Task Force

December, 1999

Introduction

The Iowa Legislature, responding to the tragedy at Columbine High School in Colorado and similar nationwide school crisis situations, enacted legislation requiring the Department of Education to establish a task force to review the preparedness of Iowa's schools. The Iowa Attorney General and Department of Public Safety assisted in the planning and creation of the Task Force.

The 27 member task force representing schools, law enforcement, firefighters, public health, emergency management, community services organizations, and others met for two days to hear testimony about crisis planning and prevention efforts in Iowa schools. A survey was conducted to discover whether school districts had a crisis plan and were engaged in prevention strategies. The results of the survey and the Task Force recommendations are included in this report.

The Task Force recommendations reinforce the need for community collaboration in crisis planning and prevention. At the state and local level greater coordination is needed for both crisis planning and prevention. For example, the survey indicates that all but a few Iowa school districts have not actively involved law enforcement, emergency responders or hospitals in the planning process.

The Task Force recommends adequate funding for research-based prevention programs as well as training for educators, parents, and others about the early warning signs of violence. The Task Force also recognized the need for legislative changes to make mental health services more accessible to youth.

The Task Force thanks the planning team members Mary Gannon, Eric Sage, Marilyn Lantz, Ann Marie Brick, Bob Garrison, and Ann McCarthy.

Recommendations of the School Violence Crisis Intervention Task Force

Prevention

A. Community Collaboration

Closer collaborative efforts at the state and local level are needed to enable schools and communities to combine resources and services for at-risk students. Students, their families, the business community, senior citizens, private, non-profit and faith-based organizations should be active participants. All students should be encouraged to participate in some program, activity, or organization within the school community.

The comprehensive school improvement efforts at the state and local level are needed to enable schools and their communities identify students academic needs as well as the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Community collaboration models such as Success4 and the Juvenile Crime Prevention Community Grants enable schools and communities to pro-actively promote positive youth behaviors and provide integrated family support services. For example, Success4 is a comprehensive school improvement process focusing school and community resources on improving the social, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual aspects of all children.

Funding should be increased to schools and communities to initiate or expand research-based prevention efforts including, but not limited to:

- School based intervention services such as School Based Youth Services
- Juvenile court school liaisons
- Character education
- Adult mentors for at-risk students
- Age specific after-school programs for students
- Conflict management curriculum
- Community service as a graduation requirement

The Department of Education should act as a clearinghouse for research-based prevention strategies. In addition, multi-agency collaboration is needed to provide school districts, parents and communities with easy access to effective strategies and technical assistance to support these strategies.

Training should be provided by AEAs and other state and community organizations to provide information to all parents, students, and school personnel on how to recognize and build a positive school environment, identify and address early warning signs of violent behavior and how to contact school officials.

Also, increased communication is needed between community partners. For example, law enforcement and schools should enter into agreements to allow for the exchange of information from juvenile student records.

Ongoing funding is needed for training of school employees and family members to better deal with conflict and anger management including threats of violence, bullying and disruptive behavior. The area education agencies and other qualified organizations should provide this training.

B. Early Childhood Development

State funding should be increased to strengthen the state's ongoing commitment to community empowerment so all Iowa communities can provide children and parents with quality early childhood development. During the first three years of life, children develop the social, emotional, and intellectual patterns that will last a lifetime. School districts and communities should focus on providing quality pre-school programs, quality health care and strong parent education programs.

C. Mental Health Services for Iowa Youth

The state should provide ongoing funding for mental health services for children. Specifically, Iowa should:

- Allow children declared as Children in Need of Assistance to receive mental health services.
- Classify mental health and related substance abuse treatment as medically necessary.
- Provide parents with necessary substance abuse or mental health treatment.
- Encourage insurance companies and employers to have adequate coverage for mental health services. Provide state back up to gaps in private insurance reimbursements for child mental health services.

D. Parental Involvement

Schools and communities should focus on increasing parental involvement including such opportunities as:

- Offering voluntary classes to parents of school aged children to enhance parenting skills and family relationships.
- Promoting employer recognition of the importance of parent involvement in schools and allow parents to volunteer in their child's school.
- Providing educators with the time and resources to effectively create and sustain the parent-school-communication including the use of web sites and e-mail.

E. Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs should move to greater emphasis on classroom management, developing school norms and understanding the emotional development of children.

Crisis Planning

A. Community Collaboration

The survey results show that Iowa school districts have some type of a crisis plan but that plans were developed in isolation. All school districts should be required to design a safety and crisis management plan. The plan should address the safety concerns for all students, including students with physical disabilities. School districts should be required to collaborate with parents, students, local law enforcement, fire and emergency medical responders, local emergency management officials and social service providers. School districts should be required to periodically review and update their crisis plan. State agencies and stakeholders should be able to provide model crisis plans and collaboratively provide technical assistance for school districts and communities. A state School Safety Audit should be developed that include instructions for school districts, law enforcement and emergency response agencies to conduct a walk-through of a school building to identify how effective their safe school plan is and suggest areas for improvement.

B. Tactical Training

Funding should be provided for crisis training for local law enforcement, emergency medical, fire, and EMS county crisis responders. Currently, many local responders need additional expertise to respond to the specific characteristics of school violence crisis situations.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE CRISIS INTERVENTION TASK FORCE

Ms. Mikel Johnson, Executive Director
Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Iowa
1350 East Washington Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50311

Carl Smith
Drake University
Resource Center for Special Education Issues
2507 University Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50311

Sarai Beck, Executive Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa
3816-36th Street
Des Moines, IA 50310

Bob Jester, President
Jester Insurance Services, Inc.
303 Keosauqua Way
Des Moines, IA 50309-1724

Cindy Laughead, Parent Coordinator
Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency 9
1422 Houser Street
Muscatine, IA 52761

Dr. Polly Nichols, Director
Educational Services
UIHC – Child Psychiatry Services
200 Hawkins Drive|1705 JPP
Iowa City, IA 52242

Deanna Klinkenberg
P.T.A. of Iowa
5712 Taylor Street
Davenport, IA 52806

The Honorable Tom Miller
Attorney General of Iowa
Hoover Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Ellen Gordon, Administrator
Emergency Management Division
Hoover Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

Richard R. Phillips, President
Iowa County Attorneys Association
Muscatine County Courthouse
401 East 3rd
Muscatine, IA 52761
Kay Forsythe
Webster City High School
825 Veach Street

Roger Duello, Secretary
Iowa Firefighters' Association
302 East Street
Brandon, IA 52210

Dr. Steve Gleason, Director
Department of Public Health
Lucas State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

Kathy Collins, Legal Counsel
School Administrators of Iowa
4500 Westown Parkway
West Des Moines, IA 50266

Ron Rice
Iowa Association of School Boards
700 Second Avenue, Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50309

Eric Sage, Program Partner
Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning
Department of Human Rights
Lucas Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

Jim Smith, Legal Counsel
Iowa State Education Association
777-3rd Street
Des Moines, IA 50309-1301

Lieutenant Donna Bacus, Executive Assistant
Department of Public Safety
Wallace Building
Des Moines, IA 50309

Tim Junker, Sheriff
Iowa State Sheriffs' and Deputies' Association
428 Sixth Street
Allison, IA 50602

Mike DeKruif
Iowa Association of Chiefs of Police and Police
Officers
P.O. Box 221
Osage, IA 50461

Ted Stilwill, Director
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Bob Vittengl, Superintendent
Maquoketa Valley Community Schools
210 South Street

Webster City, IA 50595

John Kinley, Principal
Ames Middle School
321 State Street
Ames, IA 50010

Delhi, IA 52223

Linda Williamson
School Board Member
329 200th Street
Ogden, IA 50212-7490

Robert Miller
School Board Member
1411 Water Street, Box 45
Alden, IA 50006-0045